

## Surveys of opinions of Slovak people on Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016

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### Abstract

The research study offers an analysis of the public opinion of the citizens of the Slovak Republic focused on the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016. The study also presents prevailing opinions, attitudes, preferences, and values of the Slovak people in relation to the benefits of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the EU for the Slovak Republic and the European Union. It follows from the survey of public opinion of the Slovak people that despite its ambitions, the Government of the Slovak Republic did not succeed in waking up the interest of the society in the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union as it did not resonate in the whole society. The opinions of Slovak citizens on the benefits of the presidency itself are diverse too. While the questioned respondents rather agree with the statement that the Slovak Presidency made Slovakia visible in a positive way, the majority is sceptical concerning the benefits of the Slovak Presidency for the European Union itself.

**Key words:** European Union, Presidency, Slovak Republic, survey, public opinion, citizens, opinions,

### Introduction

As part of the research study, we decided to implement the sociological research of the public opinion of Slovak Republic citizens on the issues of the Slovak Presidency in The Council of the European Union in 2016.

In the professional literature, there are several definitions of the term public opinion. In general, public opinion is a set of publicly-expressed views, attitudes, values, and ideas that are active within public opinion. There is no single public opinion, but several public opinions, or opinions resonating within society. According to Eduard Chmelár (2003, p. 8), we are subject to public opinion because we want to be part of the majority and we often believe our own experiences only after they have been confirmed by the media.

Public opinion becomes the centre of public attention particularly before the elections, referendum, or exceptional events, such as the Slovak presidency in The Council of The EU. According to Elizabeth M. Perse (2001, p. 117), since the advent of television broadcast and the more sophisticated electoral and projection methods, there were concerns that the presidential election TV news could have an impact on the election day voting and today, there is no doubt that television has a major impact on the political process, in particular the process, through which our political leaders are elected. Ľudovít Šrámek (2000, p. 79) points out the fact, that the information about public opinion state and also about the interest of media recipients according to individual media subsystems are published very often for purely pragmatic, political or economic reasons.

Tadeus Zasepa and Maciej Iłowiecki (2003, p. 70) recall that a substantial part of the public opinion in the elections is made up of prognosis. *"It happens that many initially not decided in final decision-making follow the results and vote for the party candidate, which has received the superiority. This phenomenon is called an "sheep effect".*"

The main objective of the submitted research was to analyse the current public opinion of The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016.

The secondary research objective was to ascertain whether the respondents register the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016.

Another research objective was to identify the current views, attitudes, preferences and values of respondents about The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016, regarding the benefits for the Slovak Republic and the European Union.

In the case of further planning and research design, we preferred the concept of research questions before setting research problems. We have identified one research question (RQ), which we have divided into three specific research questions:

RQ1: What is the public opinion of Slovak Republic citizens about the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016?

SRQ1: What is the respondents' political literacy regarding The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016?

We assume that two-thirds of the respondents will be aware of the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016. There will be also those who do not know about the presidency of the SR or do not want to answer that question. In this case, we relied on the results of the research executed by the Focus agency

for the EurActiv portal on the turn of January and February on a sample of 1008 respondents. According to this research, 65.4% of respondents noticed the fact that Slovakia was chaired to the Council of the EU, while 14% did not know about the presidency at all and the rest, 20.5% thought they might have heard about it, but were not sure. (Gabrižová, 2017)

SRQ2: What are the respondents views, attitudes, preferences and values regarding, whether The Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 promoted the Slovak Republic positively?

We presume that more than half of the asked Slovaks will perceive The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in the year 2016, as a positive promotion within the European Union. It is known, that the citizens of the Slovak Republic are conservative and nationally sentient at major events. In addition, the stated argument was confirmed by the mentioned 2017 Focus Agency survey, according to which 57.4% of the respondents argued that Slovakia had and positive visibility within the European Union during the Presidency. (Gabrižová, 2017)

SRQ3: What are the views, attitudes, preferences and values of the respondents concerning the benefits of The Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 for the European Union?

We think that most of the respondents will be sceptical of The Slovak Presidency to the Council of the European Union in 2016 contribution to the European Union itself. Repeatedly, we base our claims on the above-mentioned Focus Agency research in which up to 73% of respondents expressed the Slovak Republic role during the presidency was mostly administrative and organisational. However, nearly half of respondents (49.8%) was convinced that Slovakia had contributed to the development of compromises between EU countries. (Gabrižová, 2017).

## 1 The Presidency of the Slovak Republic in The Council of the European Union

In the second half of 2016, since July 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Slovak Republic was the presidency country in the Council of the European Union, which constituted one of the most important tasks resulting from Slovak Republic EU membership. The Presidency was also one of the main priorities to the Slovak Republic Government (SR Government) in the field of European affairs. The performance of our first Presidency in Slovak Republic history has been a unique opportunity to present country and make it more visible, as well as to promote the priorities of The Slovak Republic at EU level.<sup>1</sup>

The Slovak Presidency's programme in the Council of the EU was built on four priorities: an economically strong Europe, a modern single market, a sustainable migration and asylum policy and a globally committed Europe. The Slovak presidency came up with four priorities:

a) Economically strong Europe: The aim was to focus on initiatives that will contribute to the creation of an appropriate environment for investment and for the further development of the Union. A supportive environment is a key prerequisite for the development and implementation of unifying European projects, which are the essential elements of a modern single market.

b) A modern single market: The Single Market is considered to be the greatest success of the European Union. The vision of the Slovak Presidency has therefore been the further development of unifying projects such as the energy union or the single digital market.

c) Sustainable migration and asylum policy: the current migration crisis creates enormous pressures on the external border of the Union and member states asylum systems. Therefore, the ambition of the Slovak presidency was to direct the Union to a sustainable migration and asylum policy.

d) Globally committed Europe: The Union cannot be safe without stability, prosperity and democracy in its neighbourhood. Thus, the Slovak presidency wanted to promote an effective European neighbourhood policy and to maintain the dynamism of the accession process<sup>2</sup>.

The priority themes of the Slovak presidency were motivated by three interconnected principles:

a) Achieving concrete results. The Slovak presidency has been able to demonstrate to EU citizens that joint European projects have a practical impact on improving the quality of their lives.

b) Overcoming fragmentation. The Presidency will endeavour to achieve such results, contributing to the better connection of member states in the single market.

c) Focus on the citizen. The ability to bring concrete results and overcome fragmentation is the key to linking the Union to citizens. The ambition of the Slovak Presidency is to restore citizens' confidence in the European project.

### 1.1 Preparation of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union

The preparation of the Slovak Republic Presidency of the Council of the European Union (hereinafter the "Council of the EU") in 2016 was in line with the programme declaration by the Slovak Republic government

<sup>1</sup> Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU (2016). Ministry of Education, Science, research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. Available on the Internet: [https://www.minedu.sk/slovenske-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu/\(1.12.2017\)](https://www.minedu.sk/slovenske-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu/(1.12.2017)).

<sup>2</sup> Programme and priorities (2016). Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Available on the Internet: [http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo\(1st.12.2017\)](http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo(1st.12.2017)).

for the years 2012-2016, which is defined as one of the main priorities in the field of European affairs in the context of the strengthening of the Slovak position within the EU and supporting of promoting and wider involvement in key EU policy-making. The Slovak Republic Government undertakes to ensure the content, budget, personnel, as well as the logistical and organisational preparation of the Bureau.<sup>3</sup>

In order to ensure a successful and effective course of the Presidency of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter SK Pres 2016), the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, as the preparation and security coordinator of the Presidency, was imposed in point C.2. of The Government of Slovak Republic no. 392/2012 of 2012 August 8<sup>th</sup> the task of submitting to the Government meeting the material "*Report on the state of readiness of the Slovak Republic for the performance of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016*".<sup>4</sup>

Preparations for SK PRES 2016 were launched in 2012 on the basis of the material "preparation of the Slovak Republic presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016 - basic starting points and current priorities approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic". Although the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic is responsible for overall coordination, it has participated in all of the departments.

In order to guarantee effective coordination and quality of administration of the Government for the SK PRES 2016 performance, the inter-departmental coordinating board, the members of which were the state secretaries of the ministries and the Head of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, was established in the year 2012. There have also been set up inter-departmental groups concerned with logistics and security, budgeting, cultural and media presentation, human resources, as well as the political priorities preparation.

### 1.2 The Context of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union

It should be noted that the beginning of the first-ever presidency of the Slovak Republic in the Council of the European Union was marked by an unprecedented situation for the Union and its member states. This was caused by a decision of the United Kingdom citizens on the withdrawal of their country from the European Union. Although, this decision did not affect the priorities and focus of the Slovak presidency, it was defining for the atmosphere in the European Union in which the Presidency was in progress. The outcome of the referendum underlined the urgent need for a debate concerning the future of the EU, and the Slovak presidency had to host a challenging role – to contribute to restoring the Union citizens confidence in a common European project. The first step on this road was the Bratislava Summit, which, after long years, allowed the leaders of the member states to discuss openly the future of EU outside of Brussels. The beginning and the course of the Slovak presidency also influenced other complex challenges: the ongoing migration and refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and the ever-noticeable consequences of the financial and economic crisis, marked by high unemployment.<sup>5</sup>

During the six-month period, Slovakia became more visible in the world, but it did not pass without affairs, such as the logo for 4.5 thousand euros or its launching event for 200 thousand euros. Initially, the new SK Pres 2016 logo raised the interest of the laymen and experts who discussed whether it is overpriced and ugly. This was accompanied by parodies and remorse on social networks. The logo was picked from a public tendering procedure to which more than two hundred experts and laymen were signed up. The author of the logo is a 23-year old artist and designer Jakub Dušička. The state has paid 4 500 euros for the logo and was featured on documents, promotional items, brochures, banners or official communications channels, during SK Pres 2016 events in Slovakia and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, a case arose about the overpriced Slovak presidency after former employees of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Hlávková, Pavol Szali and Juraj Zelinka claimed in the media that the contracts concerning the SK Pres 2016 were not legally clean.<sup>7</sup>

The NGO Transparency International Slovakia (TIS) revealed on its blog, regarding the SK Pres 2016 opening gala-event, that there were also items from 5 to 20 thousand euros for a few minutes of event hosting.

<sup>3</sup> MZV SR. 2012. Preparation of the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 - basic background and current priorities, material number: UV-22480/2012, departmental number:480.682-2/2012-EGAC, order No.:392/2012. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=21286>

<sup>4</sup> MZV SR. 2013. Report on the state of readiness of the Slovak Republic to carry out the presidency of THE SR in the Council of the European Union in 2016. Material Number:UV-6807/2013 Departmental number:520.028/2013-PRES. Resolution No:119/2013. Available at: [http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Mater-Dokum-153115?prefixFile=m\\_](http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Mater-Dokum-153115?prefixFile=m_)

<sup>5</sup> MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of THE Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union, Material Number:UV-10668/2017, departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. Resolution No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

<sup>6</sup> KOKI (2016). The Slovak Presidency logo entertains the Internet. Watch the parody. Available on the Internet: <https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/592670-logo-slovenskeho-predsednictva-bavi-internet-pozrite-si-parodie> (1. 12.2017).

<sup>7</sup> MIKUŠOVIČ, Dušan. 2017. The third Lajčák staff member argues: The competitions for the presidency were not fair. Available on the Internet: <https://dennikn.sk/703093/uz-treti-lajcakov-zamestnanec-tvrdi-sutaze-k-predsednictvu-sa-robili-naoko/?ref=mwat> (1. 12.2017).

According to the TIS representatives, a new analysis of the bids of individual candidates for the mentioned event organisation increases the suspicion that this was a pre-agreed contract. At its end it was supposed to be a victory of the well-known agency Evka. TIS most recently argued that although the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs claimed that Evka received a contract for the logo's gala-event presentation without competition, because the volume of the contracts did not reach the limit necessary for the execution of the competition, it was not so. The Ministry has made the Market Research and the bids had come. The documents show the Evka agency did not cover all the costs that were the subject of the contract.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Data Collection and Analysis

The research was carried out in the first quarter of 2016 on the research set of 1398 respondents, which was representative of the adult population in the terms of gender, age, education and regions. The research sample consisted of 643 men and 712 women, while 43 respondents did not reveal their gender.

If we look at the research set by age, 397 respondents had 18-25 years, 326 were aged 26-35 years, 277 aged 36-45 years, 163 aged 46-55 years, 136 aged 56-65, 95 aged 65 and over, four respondents did not reply. From the research file, 475 respondents had a university education and higher, 674 respondents had high school education with graduation, 151 had high school education without graduation, 85 respondents had a basic education, 6 respondents had no education, and seven did not reveal their education.

Respondents from the research set came from the Bratislava region (73), the Trnava region (217), the Nitra region (40), the Trenčín region (506), the Žilina region (309), the Banská Bystrica region (100), the Košice region (48), and the Prešov region (94); eleven respondents not reveal their county.

In the collection of data, the questionnaire was used as the main research method. The administration of the questionnaire ensured 100 trained and experienced interviewers in person "in the field", with a 100 percent return. The questionnaire consisted of 3 closed items that provided options for quantitative processing. Two types of questions were used: dichotomous offer and simple selection. (Gavora and Coll., 2010)

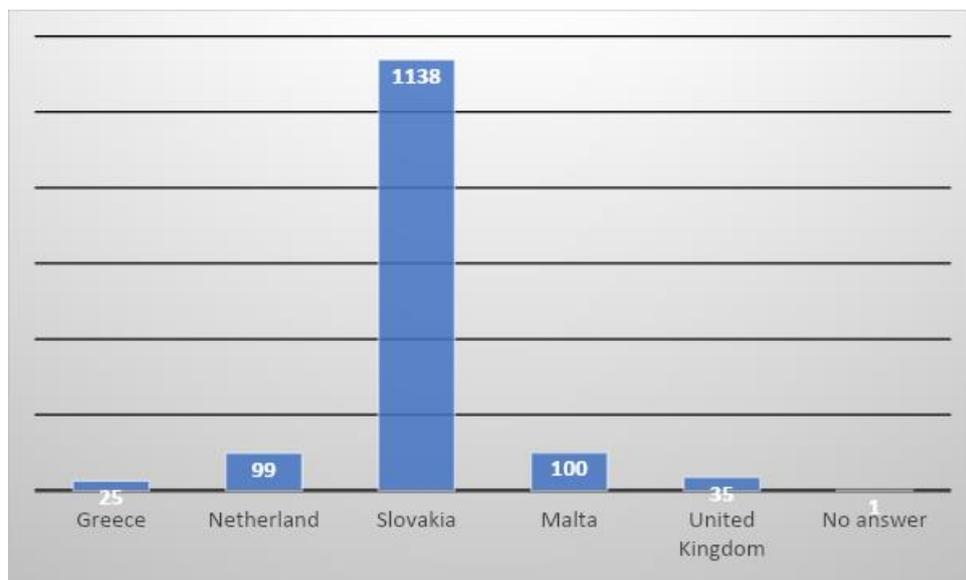
In the methodology, the questionnaire label is mostly used for techniques that identify personality traits, attitudes and motives, or adaptation mechanisms. (Maršálová et al., 1990, p. 278) We have chosen this method for several reasons. The questionnaire is an information source about social consciousness. According to A. G. Zdravomyslov (1972, p. 102-103), when questioning, the sociologist is focused just on the subjective side of things, he cares about how certain objective processes are reflected in the person's consciousness<sup>9</sup>. However, we have also chosen the questionnaire because it is intended for mass data retrieval. The creation of a good questionnaire is very challenging; thus we have been devoted increased efforts towards preparing it.

First of all, we found out whether the respondents had ever noticed that Slovakia was chaired by the Council of the European Union. Majority of respondents approached (1138-81.4%) correctly stated the Slovak Republic as the European Union presidency country. However, it is striking that, despite the extensive campaign on the Slovak presidency and a significant number of information in the Slovak media, 260 respondents (18.6%) did not know that Slovakia was chaired by the European Union. Of the incorrect responses, 100 respondents thought that the Union is chaired by Malta, the Netherlands (99), the United Kingdom (35), Greece (25), and one person could not provide an answer. More information in chart number 1.

Graph 1: Select from the options which country is currently chaired by the European Union

<sup>8</sup> BARIAK, Ladislav (2017). New facts have emerged in the Slovak Presidency's Cause. Available on the Internet: [https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/500519/v-kauze-slovenskeho-predsednictva-sa-objavili-nove-skutocnosti/\(1.12.2017\)](https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/500519/v-kauze-slovenskeho-predsednictva-sa-objavili-nove-skutocnosti/(1.12.2017)).

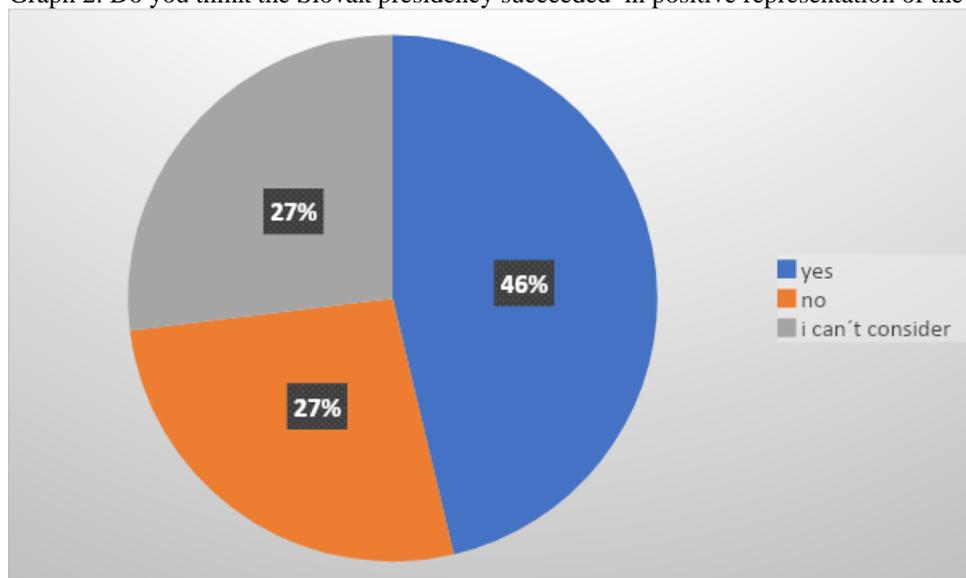
<sup>9</sup> One of the first questionnaires used for research purposes was created by Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton and used to study the imagination, confirming G. T. Fechner's older view of the underdeveloped imagination of many people in the 1980s. (Maršálová, et al., 1990, p. 278)



Source: Processed from the results our research.

Almost half of Slovaks approached (647-46%), believes that the Slovak presidency of the European Union presented the Slovak Republic positively. 374 (27%) had an opposite opinion, and 377 respondents did not respond to the question above(27%). More information in Chart 2.

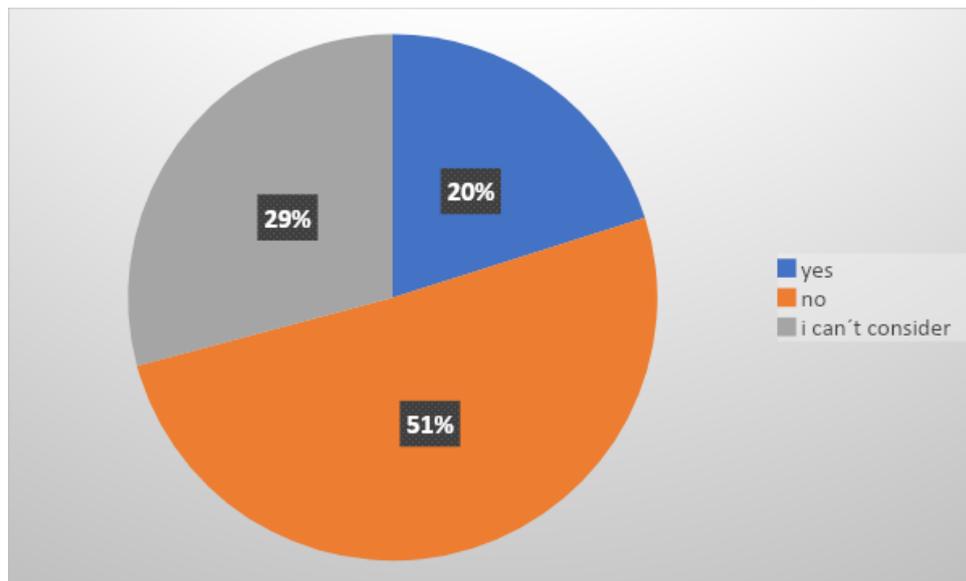
Graph 2: Do you think the Slovak presidency succeeded in positive representation of the Slovak Republic?



Source: Processed from the results of its own research.

On the other hand, the respondents did not believe that the Slovak Republic presidency of the Council of the European Union had any real results. Up to 51% of respondents approached (709), was not convinced that the Slovak Presidency had launched the expected reforms of the European Union, a third of the respondents (408) was unable to tell. 20% of asked was convinced of palpable results of the Slovak presidency towards the future of the European Union. More information in Chart 3.

Graph 3: Will the Slovak presidency launch the EU's expected reforms?



Source: Processed from the results of its own research.

### 3 Research Conclusions

As part of the first specific research question, we assumed that two-thirds of the surveyed respondents would be aware of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union in the year 2016, though there would be those who never knew about the Slovak Presidency or would not want to answer that question. This claim was confirmed, as 81.4% of the respondents correctly named the Slovak Republic as the chair country of the European Union. It should be noted that we recorded a slightly higher range of correct responses than the Focus agency in the survey, which registered "65.4% of respondents who knew about the Slovak Presidency". (Gabrižová, 2017) It follows from the foregoing, that the Slovak Republic Government failed to fulfil the objective to arouse public interest regarding the presidency. The ambition of the Slovak Republic Government, before the presidency, was to arouse an all-society interest in the presidency in order to familiarize Slovak citizens with European Union and European themes.<sup>10</sup>

In the second research question, we presumed that more than half of the respondents would perceive the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016, predominantly as a positive representation of Slovakia within the European Union. In this case, our assertion has not been confirmed, as the positive representation of Slovakia was observed by 46% of approached respondents, which is more than 10% less than the Focus research survey: *"The consent prevails with the proposition that Slovakia was positively visible and that the European Union was positively visible in Slovakia. The evaluation of the Presidency's performance is largely linked to the way in which (by respondents) the EU membership is built up and as such is highly subjective."* (Gabrižová, 2017) If we take into account the proportion of those who agreed and disagreed with this statement, including undecided, it should be noted that most agreed that the Slovak presidency contributed to the positive view of Slovakia. However, The Slovak Republic Government, in the report on the progress and results of the Presidency in the Council of the European Union, speaks only about the successes: *"In addition to promoting the programme, the Presidency is an opportunity for presenting the country abroad and bringing the EU and European topics to the citizens of Slovakia. This aspect has been taken into account in the preparation of the presidency and the half-yearly presidency period, we have made full use of the communication of European themes on domestic land and the promotion of our country and its culture to foreign visitors."*<sup>11</sup>

In the third specific research question, we expected that the majority of the surveyed respondents would be skeptical of the contribution of the Slovak presidency on the Council of the European Union in 2016 to the European Union itself. This was confirmed, as more than half of the respondents approached were not convinced that the Slovak presidency launched the expected reforms of the European Union. The respondents' views can be considered very similar to those that Focus had already mentioned. *"The respondents were most commonly identified with the statement that the role of Slovakia during the presidency was in particular administrative and organisational. 73% of respondents agree with this. The vast majority also think that the presidency of Slovakia did not involve citizens and civil society."* (Gabrižová, 2017) In this case, the Government of the SR has a different view than the public. As stated in the government paper, the Slovak Republic, in fulfilling the Union's

<sup>10</sup> What is the Presidency (2016). Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Available on the Internet: <http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo> (1. 12.2017).

<sup>11</sup> MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of the SLOVAK Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Material Number:UV-10668/2017, Departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. RESOLUTION No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

strategic priorities in the Presidency position, has worked as an honorary facilitator and mediator for a European debate. Slovakia had found itself in a new position during the presidency, when our national goals were set aside and the common interest of the Union had become the priority. *"The specific results and positive responses of our partners are evidence that we have succeeded in this position. In a number of legislative proposals, we have been able to reach agreement with the member states or an agreement with the European Parliament. Thanks to the early and rigorous preparation, Slovakia has managed its historically first presidency even on the organizational and logistical side."*<sup>12</sup>

From the discussion above, it can be noted that the outputs of the public opinion polls of the Slovak Republic concerning the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 are very similar to the Focus agency conclusions. Thus, our survey results can be considered as general, reliable and therefore relevant. The reasons for slight differences may be the different research file used and the statistical deviations.

#### 4 Discussion

In discussing the causality of citizens' interest or uninterest in the Slovak presidency, it is possible to speak about the lack of promotional campaign by the Government of the Slovak Republic, the lack of communication of politicians with citizens regarding the subject, and also the lack of space in mass media to explain the importance of the Slovak presidency for the European Union, for the Slovak Republic, and its citizens.

Several experts have noted that, in the last decade, the general interest of mass media in the mediation of information from the political scene has declined. The problem is mainly the minimum amount of information, or frequently, no information at all, from the European Union. Although the message from the European institutions to the citizen is undeniable, as the union has an increasingly powerful impact on the development and functioning of our country. (Lincényi, Fabuš, 2012: 166)

Today, it is no longer disputed that the means of mass communication play an important role in social communication. The mass media has an impact on recipients, but the subject of researchers' inspiration are questions of form and intensity of these effects on person and society.. The scientific discussion has abandoned the views that the media are shaping public opinion, but it is said that mass media have a major impact on the shaping of public opinion. The influence, or the creation of public opinion has been challenged by Ivan Stadtrucker (2007, p. 413) who considers the goal of mass media informing the public to be the formation of public opinion in the first place. The person who has control over the media, according to M. A. Vericka (2009, p. 12, 14-15), also controls the public opinion and thus the electoral voices. The journalists decide on the success and the bust, what is right and what is wrong, regardless of the facts. As reported by M. A. Verick, journalists control politicians and ensure that they act in the interests of society. It should be said that the mass media do not persuade the percipients about how they are supposed to think, but by their message we are persuading us about what to think about. Marshall McLuhan (1991, p. 20), marked the media as a message, because it is just shaping and controlling the scale as well as the form of human association and activity.

We think that the mass media in the 21st century are not fulfilling their role, which should be implemented from a functionalist approach of media perception. Despite the fact that they have a prominent role in communicating social realities towards the citizen, they minimise informational, social, cultural and political function at the expense of entertaining content. The media should allocate more space in the news to political reports from home and abroad, including investigative intelligence. Citizens should learn more news from Europe, since the decision-making of European institutions concerns them more and more. We also think that members of the European Parliament and Slovak representatives in the European institutions should be more active in informing the journalists in Slovakia and not wait for the interest of the other party. Slovak representatives in the European institutions should offer journalists such topics that are interesting for information. It is also necessary to put emphasis on understandable information on individual topics, since European legislation is very complex in itself and can discourage some journalists in this aspect.

We think that contributing factors to public's negative assessments were the discussed views (Řádek, 2016) and the negative moods that have been rising within the European Union since the economic crisis (Fabuš 2012, Toth, Mura 2014, Janas, Kucharčík 2014), and the consequent decline of confidence in the European Union, also confirmed by Eurobarometer polls in several member states 2015<sup>13</sup>

We think that an effective marketing and media campaign could help to improve the public opinion on the European Union's actions, as well as citizens' trust in the European institutions. Such a campaign should be carried out throughout the European Union under the European Commission coordination. (See campaign Polakevičová 2016, Szabo 2016, Machová, Huszárík, Tóth 2016)

<sup>12</sup> MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of the SLOVAK Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Material Number:UV-10668/2017, Departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. RESOLUTION No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

<sup>13</sup> VAČKO, F. (2015) Eurobarometer / People's confidence in the European Union has fallen. The European Union. Available from: <http://europa.europa.eu/eurobarometer-dovera-poklesla/> (20.12.2017)

## 5 Conclusion

The implemented sociological research of public opinion of the citizens of the Slovak Republic reveals several political science starting points:

In 2016, the Government of the Slovak Republic failed to arouse society-wide interest in the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as it originally intended, as not all respondents were aware that Slovakia was holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. From the above, it is also debatable whether the Government of the Slovak Republic has managed to sufficiently bring the European Union and European issues closer to the citizens of the Slovak Republic. This points at the limits of the Slovak Presidency campaign and should be a signal for the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic as the purchaser of the future image campaign. We think that the main reasons why the Slovak presidency did not become a society-wide topic was insufficient promotional campaign of the Government of the Slovak Republic, insufficient “towards citizens” communication of politicians about the Slovak presidency importance, and last but not least, the lack of mass media information about the Slovak presidency importance.

Research has also shown that the respondents’ have different views on the benefits of the presidency itself. So far, as the respondents have expressed, the Slovak Presidency has contributed to the positive visibility of Slovakia, on the other hand most of the asked respondents are skeptical concerning the contribution of the Slovak Presidency 2016 of the Council of the European Union to the European Union itself from the perspective of the start of the expected reforms. We are of the opinion that the skeptic evaluation of the success of the Slovak presidency in the European Union could be the result of the ongoing negative sentiments within the European Union, which transform into a decline in confidence towards the European Union. Even in this case, it is necessary that Slovak politicians working in the European institutions, as well as other politicians, explain more the need and importance of Slovakia's membership in the European Union, as well as the benefits it brings the citizens.

Our study does not claim a comprehensive view of the analysis of the public opinion of Slovaks on the Slovak Presidency issue. This topic offers several other processing options. First of all, it will be very interesting to analyze the Slovaks public opinion on the Slovak presidency of the Council of Europe after the very year of the study, or during the next presidency. It would also be interesting to compare the results of opinion polls in individual member states of the European Union.

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